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Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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Gentlemen:

I am sending you a collection of papers from some of my experiences of people during the Holocaust. In spite of the fact that I was not in Auschwitz I went through a lot. It is just a miracle that I ever made it to the U.S.A.

It breaks my heart to part from these papers, I felt like crying when I emptied the box where I saved these papers all these years. But I am 81 years old and you can never tell what comes tomorrow. I decided to send it to you with the hope you can use some of it.

I have two daughters (and six grandchildren) both professionals and they work very hard. I have seen and read many books about what happens to all the collections and pictures parents made during their lifetimes. Some of the articles from various newspapers are documented somewhere, but I feel some of them could be repeated again and again never to forget what happened to our children, brothers, parents and grandparents. If alive today I would have a brother 73 years old and a son 56 years old. Here enclosed under separate cover is the story of my life as follows:

1 The Tabaks and the Family Tree

2 My personal experiences with the Nazis and the Hungarian Hoodlums.

3 The eagerness and willingness of the ordinary Hungarians to turn in as many Jews as possible and my own experience in Nagyvarad and Budapest. I could have escaped twice if they hadn't turned me in.

4 My daughter's speech (she is a lifetime member of Hadassah) at the temple "Emanuel " Jewish Center" in Mt. Vernon, Westchester where she lives. *YEARLY MEMORIAL - "SHOA"*

Here I wish to give you an example of what the Hungarian ordinary people did. They were willing and eager to turn in and kill anybody who did not appeal to them. When I escaped in Nagyvarad from the bunker where the dogs discovered us I was able to run away through another exit and run up a little hill in Nagyvarad called Calvary and hide there till it got dark. I figured the superintendent of the building where we had lived, which was empty, would be able to hide me. But some young Hungarian volunteers were combing the streets, parks, rivers, wherever to find somebody. This Hungarian guy discovered us. I begged him not to turn me in, and he promised me okay. Ten minutes later the police appeared, handcuffed us and took us into the jail. After a few days (since there were no more Jews in Nagyvarad) they took us to Budapest to the Mosonyi Jail where we found Hungarian Jews discovered hidden someplace and turned in by Hungarian friends or neighbors. (They all wore big crosses, but that did not help.) They emptied the jail and everybody was taken to Auschwitz I stayed behind because the doctor told them I needed a few days till I could use my hands* From there they took us to a small camp, Kistarcsa, where the doctor was from Nagyvarad.) *DR. OELBAUM **

A few weeks later Horty Miklos came back to power and freed all the campers. We returned to Budapest hoping we were free. This lasted a few days and the SZALASI REGIME came to power and they started the whole nazi procedure again; concentrated all the Jews in a few Jewish houses with yellow stars, locked up all day except for two hours a day for food shopping. Every Jew had to wear again the yellow star. We were

first in Kiraly Ucsa 10, but every night two to three Hungarian hoodlums came in and took out with them two to three people who never came back. We realized this is not a safe place they came every night, not the Nazis and not the police, ordinary Hungarian people. They went to the hospitals, they went to the Swedish consulate at night and pulled out people and shot them in the streets some neighbors recognized them. While we were hidden by those gentiles, there was a small hotel across the street. We heard shots during the night and in the morning we peeked out the windows and saw the corpses in the street in front of the hotel. Not only the ordinary Germans were willing executioners like D.J. Goldhagen writes in his book; the Hungarians were just as willing to kill as many Jews as they could turn in.

* *Where I say use my hands, I practically had no hands, when we fled from the bunker we came down with some ropes we prepared in case of emergency. I did not know how to handle the rope, and held on to dear life. But the rope ate out the flesh of my fingers. You can see, or I was able to see the bones of each of my fingers and I had excruciating pain. Dr. Celbaum was an Angel sent from Heaven. The marks of the burns can still be seen on my fingers. Dr. Celbaum was in the Mosony jail in Budapest.*

A LOOK AT SZIGET AND THE FAMILY TREE OF THE TABAKS

11

1750-1770:

It started out as a small community of 20-30 Jewish families and grew to be a town of about 11,000 Jewish people, with a total town population of 21,000-22,000.

By 1944, Only a stone monument was left out of the 11,000 Jews (except for 300-400 families scattered all over the world (see photo of monument enclosed)

It is unthinkable that a thriving Hassidic and orthodox Jewish town like Sziget is all gone and will never be again. These pious Jews, those 100% observant Jews, who lived by the book "to eat only to live" and not "to live to eat". The book never left their hands, from sunrise into the late hours of the evening, and sometimes they even slept over their books, and continues when they awoke, not to miss a second of their studies.

I come from one of those Hassidic families named the Tabaks. My great grandfather was Shlomo-Leib Tabak (1832-1908). Born in Sziget, he was a brilliant young man, studied in the Yeshiva of Rabbi Judah Hakohen Schwartz in Beregsian. He served as head of the Beth-Din of Jekuthiel Judah Teitelbaum and continued in that office for many years after Teitelbaum's death. He had eight children.. He had written a number of books under the pen name of the 'Erech Shai'. (See letter attached, Brooklyn, 6/11/85) *FAMILY NAME SLOMO LEIB TABAK - see Encyclopedia Judaica.*

A great rabbi here in New York told me that he uses the Erech Shai book as a guideline, before answering a verdict, Some of his works were reprinted here in New York in 1965.

His son, Mayer David Tabak took over his position and continued serving the community as well as setting up his own practice as Dayan of Sziget. He was not a good businessman, and he did not care. The story goes there was another Dayan in Sziget, Shlomo Heller, who took away all the "Dine Torahs" (which was a good income as Sziget was poor, and there were plenty of "Dine Torah"). In turn, he sent my grandfather all the 'shailoth' (questions), like a chicken leg was broken, or a nail was found in the chickens stomach, etc. etc. As I remember my grandfather with the gigantic books always on his table, bent in two, and never leaving them; brooding over them to fully master them inside out.

Mayer David Tabak, my grandfather lived in two rooms and a stone age kitchen. In one room he lived with his wife, and in another room lived his daughter Devorah (the youngest of his seven children), with her husband, Rabbi Joseph Bech, She was the only one to follow in the footsteps of our grandparents. As a dowry, Rabbi Bech was promised the position of my grandfather, but only after his death. In the meantime, they lived together in the two rooms, and Devorah and Joseph Bech raised eight children of their own in that one room. It was not easy, but they never complained, as long as they were able to study and bury their heads day in, day out, in the various Talmudic subjects. Where do you find people like that today? There will never be another generation like that one to live so modestly just for the book.

Because of the meager existence the Dayanuth promised, six out of seven children turned to business. My father Shaye Tabak, a businessman, went to Shul twice a day, morning and evening, visited his father daily and was near him till the last minute of his life. Pesach Tabak and Hillel Tabak came to the U.S.A. in time and saved their families from the holocaust.

Only the grandchildren of Meyer David Tabak, the Sziget Dayan survived. Some of them live in Williamsburg and in Boro Park continuing the same tradition as our fathers,

grandfathers, and great grandfathers. We have to bear in mind that girls were not allowed to study, it was considered taboo, an eye opener. Had we had that chance to study, Amy Eilberg would not have been the first Conservative Judaism female rabbi. Serena Tabak (Goldring) was instrumental in founding the Jewish National Committee of Maramoros Sziget, Chapter #134 in Bnai Zion and is still trying desperately to get her friends and landsmen together, not to forget Sziget. Chaim Tabak lives in Be'er Sheba, and Serena Tabak (Goldring) in New York. Shlome Tabak, unfortunately died in Buchenwald, right after liberation.

As we look at the family tree of the Tabaks, you can see as follows:

Erech Shai - Shlome Leib Tabak - *SEE ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA*

Five sons, three daughters

Meir David Tabak - *DAYAN IN SZIGET*

Five sons, two daughters

Yochock Tabak

Five daughters, three sons

Hillel Tabak

Two sons, two daughters

Pesach Tabak

Two sons

Zvi (Hershl) Tabak

Six sons, five daughters

Shaye Tabak

Two sons, one daughter - *SERENA TABAK GOLDRING, N.Y. CHAIM TABAK - BEER SHEVA*

Alta Chana Tabak

Five sons, three daughters

Devorah Tabak-Bech

Four sons, four daughters

Where do you find families like that today?

I was born in Maramaros-Sziget which at one point was Romania and at one point was Hungary. In 1940 I was engaged to be married in July at which point Sziget belonged to Hungary, already under the Nazi's influence. Traveling was restricted. Trains were searched and whoever did not appeal to them was removed from the train and disappeared for good. My fiance was from Nagyvarad, and I prayed and hoped he would make it to the wedding. We moved to Nagyvarad where Jews were not allowed to open a new business, unless he associated with a gentile partner. Hardships had already started.

In March, 1944, the Germans marched into Nagyvarad and immediately started searches of the homes of foreign citizens, Zionists and the rich people. My brother-in-law happened to be a very wealthy business man (Emanuel Gutman) and he immediately built a Bunker. Since we were related, we were afraid if they do not find him in his home, they will come and search the homes of relatives and take whomever they find. And so, we spent some time already some sleepless nights in the bunker. The Passover seders were spent in the bunker as well. During all this time we had to wear the YELLOW STAR and only certain hours allowed for shopping food. Soon they ordered all Jews into the Ghetto. I was in my ninth month of pregnancy, and gave birth to a beautiful red haired boy on the floor of the make-shift hospital in the Ghetto. As soon as I was on my feet, we started to look for another Bunker within the walls of the Ghetto, hoping one day to escape. We found the RITUAL BATHHOUSE OF Nagyvarad which had a storage space attached with a little roof where we can hide. We knew the people who operated the bathhouse and their daughter together with other four people (all together seven people) we decided to hide there. We toasted bread for weeks, and carried food there every day. The operators daughter and two or three people slept there every night to get acquainted with the place. The night my husband and I were in line to sleep over, they emptied the hospital and took my SON away never to see him again. Soon we all moved into the bunker, seven people lying down like sardines in a box. At night we pulled out a few bricks from the wall, enough for a human body to slide through, and climbed into the Bathhouse. There was a toilet and some drinking water. We washed and took care of the necessities and returned to our bunker. We layed back the bricks, just in case they searched the bathhouse. One day the Hungarian and German authorities came to check if the Ghetto was properly cleaned and the dogs started to bark; they smelled human beings. They went for a ladder during which time we all ran out. We had prepared some ropes in case of an emergency and as I went down the rope, it burned and ate the flesh of my fingers to the bone. I was able to see the bone of each finger. My fingers burned like fire; the pain was excruciating. They caught us, and put us in jail, in Nagyvarad. After a few days, they transported us to the Mosony Jail in Budapest. There, I was lucky. The Doctor took me immediately under his care; the guard took me every day for treatment till my hands healed a little.

The scars are still visible on every finger. They emptied the Mosony Jail but because of my fingers they postponed my transportation and everybody else was sent to AUSCHWITZ. I stayed there for two more weeks until one day they decided to send me to KIS-TARCSA CONCENTRATION CAMP near Budapest. We had Hungarian guards inside the camp, German guards outside the camp, and in the towers. We spent a few months there till one day the HORTY MIKLOS GOVERNMENT freed us and let us go to Budapest. This freedom did not last very long, because the SZALASY GOVERNMENT took over and we were forced back again in the GHETTO, back again in the houses with YELLOW STARS, we were forced to wear the YELLOW STAR again, and allowed only two hours daily for food shopping. We tried to hide again, because during the night they came into the houses with the YELLOW STARS, pulled out a few people, and dragged them into the street, and shot them there or took them down to the edge of the Danube and shot them there. One night we decided to go up on the roof of the building and crawl over to the roof of the next building which was a Gentile building and hide in the attic of that building. It was very dangerous because during the night we had to come down for food, and there was a risk of falling between the buildings into the air shafts. After a few nights, we gave this up and we came down. One Sunday, while we were watching the people coming out of Church, we encountered a Gentile couple from Nagyvarad who had fled the Russian army, and begged them to take us in. They told us, if we could bring a mattress, we can set up house in one of their bathrooms. We were also able to obtain Gentile papers, just in case they searched the buildings. When the Russians started to bomb Budapest, the entire building moved down to the cellar, and set up house there. We could not get down, because we were afraid that someone would call the police and tell on us. The building was hit by a 70kg incendiary bomb, and the whole house was in shambles. We were very lucky, we survived in the bathtub, covered with one of the doors. I say 'we' because all this time I was with my husband who passed away in 1970. We struggled for two or three weeks of hard bombardment until we were liberated in March, 1945. When we came out of the building, the streets were full of dead bodies; heads, legs strewn all over the city. There was no food, no bread; people were killing each other for a piece of bread. We were hanging around the streets to get some food and mostly to find the Russian trucks which were stationed in the city to beg them to take us back to Nagyvarad. We heard there was some food already there because they had been liberated much earlier. And finally, in April of 1945 we arrived back in Nagyvarad after:

- I lost my Beautiful SON
- I went through TWO JAILS + 2 GETTOS
- I went through KIS-TARCSA CONCENTRATION CAMP
- Lost my MOTHER and FATHER
- Lost my BROTHER someplace in BUCHENWALD
- Lost sensitivity in BOTH MY HANDS

CAN ALL THIS EVER BE REPAID WITH ANY AMOUNT OF MONEY IN THIS WORLD???

LIVIA SKLAR - HER SPEECH AT EMANUEL JEWISH CENTER, MT. VERNON, NY
DAUGHTER OF SERENA TABAK GOLDRING YOM HASHOA

IV

I've always felt there should be a blessing--if there isn't one already--for children to recite, thanking their parents for bringing them into this world and giving them life. For me, and every other child of Holocaust survivors, this thanks has a special meaning. To understand why, I have to take you back to a city on the border of Rumania and Hungary called Oradea.

Have you ever heard of Oradea, or as it is known in Hungarian, Nagyvarad? Oradea, a thriving, busy city with 25,000 Jewish inhabitants ^{before WWII,} had the most culturally and economically active Jewish community in both Rumania and Hungary. There were prolific Hebrew printing houses, and prominent Jewish journalists who wrote for Hungarian newspapers. There were active branches of the Zionist movement and very vocal supporters of various political parties. There were ~~many~~ traditional orthodox synagogues, as well as a famous neolog--that's what they called reform--congregation. There was even a following for two different Hassidic rabbis within the community. There were so many Jewish institutions: a hospital several public schools, an orthodox high school and a neolog high school, to name a few.

And the war came late to my parents city of Oradea. It was already 1944, and in this bustling city it almost seemed that Hitler might be defeated before he had time to accomplish

further destruction. But this was, unfortunately, not to be the case. For in 1944 the German-Hungarian administration established a ghetto in Oradea and began removing its occupants to death camps.

For my parents, married only a short time and trying to care for a newborn son, Oradea in 1944 must have been a nightmare. The once friendly city--their home--suddenly turned into a prison. On all sides, people struggling to escape, only to have one door after another shut in their faces. My parents were gentle people, not equipped in any way to deal with the Nazi war machine. But they were survivors. They were able to devise a plan. In that crowded ghetto they found an obscure, easily overlooked place in the small crawl-space in the roof of a local Mikveh. And so, when all the Jews of Oradea were deported to death camps, my parents, as part of a group of about a dozen people, remained secretly hidden in this space, where they couldn't even stand straight up. Their infant son they entrusted to the care of a Jewish doctor. Even the Germans needed doctors, my parents thought, so they would never harm a doctor and his family. Subsisting on dry toast for a few weeks, they were discovered one day when police dogs picked up their scent. The police were in a quandary. Since the transports had already left for the death camps and not a single other Jew remained in Oradea, it was decided to send my parents to a work camp in Hungary. Their ordeal was far from over, but at least they had

survived that initial transport to the death camp.

When the war ended, my parents were among the approximately 8,000 Jews who made their way back to Oradea. Most of the members of their immediate families had perished, including my two sets of grandparents and the infant son who, of course, had been deported with the doctor. Yet, amazingly, my parents set about rebuilding their lives and their community as best they could. And so, less than two years after the deportation of all the Jews of Oradea, I was born, the first baby in the newly reopened Jewish hospital.

I will always marvel that my parents decided to have me after what they'd been through. For them, having a child was an act of affirmation, that life could still be good. And perhaps it was also an act of defiance--that the Jewish people would survive despite the Nazis.

I was also surprised that my parents could still have any faith left, still go to synagogue and pray, and practice their religion in an orthodox fashion. Of course, it's not for me to judge them--they acted according to their beliefs, just as I must act according to mine. But I think we would agree on this: That our children must learn about the Holocaust and what happened to our family and our people simply because we are Jews.

There was a point in my life where I felt that being born Jewish was an accident of birth, a quirk of fate. But more recently I've

come to the conclusion that my Jewishness isn't an accident, a chance event. My parents, my grandparents and all my ancestors before them made a very deliberate choice--which they sometimes paid for dearly--to be Jewish and bring up their children as Jews. I am part of this chain, and I've chosen to make my children part of this chain, and that is why they're here tonight, lighting candles with me.

So when I talk about thanking my parents for being here, my thanks carries with it the extra gratitude that a child of survivors feels--Thank you for surviving. Thank you for being here so my children can know the joy of being loved by and loving a grandparent.. Thank you for reaffirming that it's good to be alive and be Jewish.

* * *

FAMILY TREE OF ERECH SHAI Z"L PEN NAME

FAMILY NAME SLOMOLEIB TABAK
SEE ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA
Three Daughters

Five Sons

1. Meir Dovid- Szigeter DAYAN
2. Shulem - Salatfener
3. Mordechai - Berbesht
4. Chaim - Apsha
5. Menachem - Dibova

1. Rifka married Reb Aaron Fisch
2. Alta married Reb Avrohom Weider
3. Chana married Reb Shlomo Heller

FAMILY OF REB MEIR DOVID- DAYAN OF SZIGET
MY GRANDFATHER

First wife - Charna
son

1. Yitzchok

Second wife - Serl
children

2. Hillel
3. Pesach
4. Tzvi
5. Shiya TABAK - MY FATHER
6. Alta Chana Yita
7. Devorah

Family of Reb Yitzchok

1. Shlomo Leib
2. Ben Zion
3. Alta
4. Chanya
5. Leah
6. Rifka
7. Yente
8. Chaim Meir

Family of Reb Hillel Tabak

1. Shlomo Leib
2. Zecharia Mendel
3. Stella
4. Judy

Family of Reb Pesach Tabak

Two sons living in Cleveland.

Family of Reb Tzvi Tabak married to Chaya Surah

There were 6 sons and 5 girls.

Living of what we know-- 1. Ruchel 2. Shulem 3. Tzvi

Refer to R' Shulem Tabak for the rest of the children.

Family of Reb Shiya Tabak Son-in-law by Shlomo Steimetz from Raziva.

ROZAVLIA

Two Sons

One Daughter

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Chaim BEER SHEVA ISRAEL | 2. Serl TABAK GOLDRING A.S. * |
| 2. Shloime DIED BUCHENWALD | |

Family of Alta Chana Yita Her husband was Avrohom Moskowitz from Ganitsh.

There were 5 sons and 3 daughters.

Those that we know are living are:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Shlomo Leib Mueller | --living in Montreal, Canada. |
| 2. Moshe Tabak | --living in Montreal, Canada. |
| 3. Mechel <u>Tabak</u> | --Living in '123, Isreal. |

Family of Devorah Wife of Reb Yosef Beck-Sziget Dayan

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Serl | 5. Aron Hersh |
| 2. Chana | 6. Shlomo Leib |
| 3. Yitel | 7. Avrumi |
| 4. Hencha Rifka | 8. Chaim |

FAMILY OF REB SHULEM (son of Erech Shai)

Shaindel was the wife of Reb Shulem.

Children

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| 1. Alta Yosef | 5. Alexander |
| 2. Shneur Zalman | 6. Fradel |
| 3. Yitzchok | 7. Devorah |
| 4. Moshe | 8. Ruchel |

FAMILY TREE OF ERECH SHAI (cont.)

Family of Reb Mordechai (son of Erech Shai z"l.)

Son that we know about-- 1. Reb Usher 2. Chaim (werarenot sure of)

Family of Reb Menachem (son of Erech Shai)

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Yitzchok | 2. Tzivia |
|-------------|-----------|

Family of Rifka (daughter of Erech Shai)

Rifka married Reb Aaron Fisch.

1. Shlomo Leib
2. Toby Roth still living
3. Sasa Lebowitz--married Simcha Lebowitz

Family of Alta (daughter of Erech Shai)

Alta married Reb Avrohom Vieder.

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| 1. Yosef | 4. Tzvi |
| 2. Alter (son) | 5. Rifka |
| 3. Boruch | 6. Meir Ber |

Family Of Chana (daughter of Erech Shai)

- | | | |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. Devorah | 2. Menachem | 3. Hencia Rifka |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|

Chana married Reb Shlomo Heller.

Family of Chaim (son of Erech Shai)

1. Reb Yecheskel--now living in Chaifa, Israel.
2. Sruel Dovid
3. Sarah Weinberger is a son of Sarah now living in Montreal.

FAMILY TREE OF ERECH SHAI z"l (cont.)

Family of Shlomo Leib Mueller (son of Alta Chana Yita Moskowitz.)

- 1. Hershel Shmuel Zvi
- 2. Shraga Feivel
- 3. Meir Dovid
- 4. Serl married to Shmidman.

Family of Moshe Tabak (son of Alta Chana Yita Moskowitz.)

- 1. Avraham Chaim Tabak

Family of Shulem Tabak (son of Tzvi Tabak.)

- 1. Chaya Surah
- 2. Hershel

Family of Mechel Tabak (son of Alta Chana Moskowitz)

- 1. Avrum
 - 2. Sarah
- } ISRAEL

FAMILY TREE OF ERECH SHAI (cont.)

Family of Serl (daughter of Devorah Beck)

Wife of Elias Malek

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Meir Yosef | 5. Mordechai Hersh |
| 2. Devorah | 6. Chaya Surah |
| 3. Shulem | 7. Chaim Hillel |
| 4. Yehudis | |

Family of Helen Jacober (daughter of Devorah Beck)

Wife of Moshe Jacober

1. Devorah
2. Chaim Eliezer

Family of Seri (daughter of Reb Shiya)

Children

1. Livia
2. Felicia

Family of Fradel Fogel (daughter of Reb Shulem)

1. Perel married to Naftala Altman
2. Rifchu married to Shamai Hartman
3. Dory married to Moshe Berkowitz
4. Shulem Fogel
5. Moshe Fogel

Family of Stella (daughter of Hillel Tabak)

1. Sandra

2. Jimmy

Stella's husband was Dr. Keene

